United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to the Honorable Steven H. Schiff, House of Representatives

July 1995

GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Results of a Search for Records Concerning the 1947 Crash Near Roswell, New Mexico

GAO/NSIAD-95-187

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-262046

July 28, 1995

The Honorable Steven H. Schiff
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Schiff:

On July 8, 1947, the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF) public information office in Roswell, New Mexico, reported the crash and recovery of a "flying disc." Army Air Forces personnel from the RAAF's 509th Bomb Group were credited with the recovery. The following day, the press reported that the Commanding General of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, Fort Worth, Texas, announced that RAAF personnel had recovered a crashed radar-tracking (weather) balloon, not a "flying disc."

After nearly 50 years, speculation continues on what crashed at Roswell. Some observers believe that the object was of extraterrestrial origin. In the July 1994 Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident, the Air Force did not dispute that something happened near Roswell, but reported that the most likely source of the wreckage was from a balloon-launched classified government project designed to determine the state of Soviet nuclear weapons research. The debate on what crashed at Roswell continues.

Concerned that the Department of Defense (DOD) may not have provided you with all available information on the crash, you asked us to determine the requirements for reporting air accidents similar to the crash near Roswell and identify any government records concerning the Roswell crash.

We conducted an extensive search for government records related to the crash near Roswell. We examined a wide range of classified and unclassified documents dating from July 1947 through the 1950s. These records came from numerous organizations in New Mexico and elsewhere throughout DOD as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council. The full scope and methodology of our work are detailed at the end of this report.

Results in Brief

In 1947, Army regulations required that air accident reports be maintained permanently. We identified four air accidents reported by the Army Air Forces in New Mexico during July 1947. All of the accidents involved military aircraft and occurred after July 8, 1947—the date the RAAF public information office first reported the crash and recovery of a "flying disc" near Roswell. The Navy reported no air accidents in New Mexico during July 1947. Air Force officials told us that according to record-keeping requirements in effect during July 1947, there was no requirement to prepare a report on the crash of a weather balloon.

In our search for records concerning the Roswell crash, we learned that some government records covering RAAF activities had been destroyed and others had not. For example, RAAF administrative records (from Mar. 1945 through Dec. 1949) and RAAF outgoing messages (from Oct. 1946 through Dec. 1949) were destroyed. The document disposition form does not indicate what organization or person destroyed the records and when or under what authority the records were destroyed.

Our search for government records concerning the Roswell crash yielded two records originating in 1947—a July 1947 history report by the combined 509th Bomb Group and RAAF and an FBI teletype message dated July 8, 1947. The 509th-RAAF report noted the recovery of a "flying disc" that was later determined by military officials to be a radar-tracking balloon. The FBI message stated that the military had reported that an object resembling a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector had been recovered near Roswell.

The other government records we reviewed, including those previously withheld from the public because of security classification, and the Air Force's analysis of unidentified flying object[1] sightings from 1946 to 1953 (Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14), did not mention the crash or the recovery of an airborne object near Roswell in July 1947. Similarly, executive branch agencies' responses to our letters of inquiry produced no other government records on the Roswell crash.

Reporting Air Accidents

According to press accounts from July 1947, Army Air Forces personnel from RAAF were involved in the recovery of an airborne object near Roswell. Therefore, if an air accident report was prepared, it should have

[1]According to Air Force regulation, an unidentified flying object is an airborne object that by performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features, does not conform to known aircraft or missiles, or does not correspond to Air Force definitions of familiar or known objects or unidentified aircraft.

been prepared in accordance with Army regulations. According to an Army records management official, in 1947 Army regulations required that air accident reports be maintained permanently. An Air Force official said there was no similar requirement to report a weather balloon crash.

According to an Air Force official who has worked in the records management field since the mid-1940s, air accident reports prepared in July 1947 under Army regulations should have been transferred to Air Force custody in September 1947, when the Air Force was established as a separate service.

The Air Force Safety Agency is responsible for maintaining reports of air accidents. We examined its microfilm records to determine whether any air accidents had been reported in New Mexico during July 1947. We identified four air accidents during this time period.[2] All of the accidents involved military fighter or cargo aircraft and occurred after July 8, 1947—the date the RAAF public information office first reported the crash and recovery of a "flying disc" near Roswell. According to the Army Air Forces' Report of Major Accident, these four accidents occurred at or near the towns of Hobbs, Albuquerque, Carrizozo, and Alamogordo, New Mexico. Only one of the four accidents resulted in a fatality. The pilot died when the aircraft crashed during an attempted take-off.

Search for Records

In searching for government records on the Roswell crash, we were particularly interested in identifying and reviewing records of military units assigned to RAAF in 1947—to include the 509th Bomb Group, the 1st Air Transport Unit, the 427th Army Air Force Base Unit, and the 1395th Military Police Company (Aviation).

Document disposition forms obtained from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri, indicate that in 1953, the Walker Air Force Base (formerly RAAF) records officer transferred to the Army's Kansas City records depository the histories of units stationed at Walker Air Force Base. These histories included the 509th Bomb Group and RAAF for February 1947 through October 1947; the 1st Air Transport Unit for July 1946 through June 1947; and the 427th Army Air Force Base Unit for January 1946 to February 1947. We could not locate any documentation indicating that records of the 1395th Military Police Company (Aviation)

[2]These records do not include information regarding mishaps of air vehicles belonging to civilian or other government agencies. These records also do not include mishaps involving unmanned air vehicles such as remotely piloted aircraft, low-speed cruise missiles, and most balloons.

were ever retired to the National Personnel Records Center or its predecessor depositories.

The July 1947 history for the 509th Bomb Group and RAAF stated that the RAAF public information office "was kept quite busy . . . answering inquiries on the 'flying disc,' which was reported to be in [the] possession of the 509th Bomb Group. The object turned out to be a radar tracking balloon." By his signature, the RAAF's commanding officer certified that the report represented a complete and accurate account of RAAF activities in July 1947. (Excerpts from the report are contained in app. I.)

In addition to unit history reports, we also searched for other government records on the Roswell crash. In this regard, the Chief Archivist for the National Personnel Records Center provided us with documentation indicating that (1) RAAF records such as finance and accounting, supplies, buildings and grounds, and other general administrative matters from March 1945 through December 1949 and (2) RAAF outgoing messages from October 1946 through December 1949 were destroyed. According to this official, the document disposition form did not properly indicate the authority under which the disposal action was taken. The Center's Chief Archivist stated that from his personal experience, many of the Air Force organizational records covering this time period were destroyed without entering a citation for the governing disposition authority. Our review of records control forms showing the destruction of other records—including outgoing RAAF messages for 1950—supports the Chief Archivist's viewpoint.

During our review of records at FBI headquarters, we found a July 8, 1947, teletype message from the FBI office in Dallas, Texas, to FBI headquarters and the FBI office in Cincinnati, Ohio. An FBI spokesperson confirmed the authenticity of the message.

According to the message, an Eighth Air Force headquarters official had telephonically informed the FBI's Dallas office of the recovery near Roswell of a hexagonal-shaped disc suspended from a large balloon by cable. The message further stated that the disc and balloon were being sent to Wright Field (now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio) for examination. According to the Eighth Air Force official, the recovered object resembled a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector. The message stated that no further investigation by the FBI was being conducted. (A copy of the teletype message appears in app. II.)

To follow up on the July 8th message, we reviewed microfilm abstracts of the FBI Dallas and Cincinnati office activities for July 1947. An abstract prepared by the FBI Dallas office on July 12, 1947, summarized the particulars of the July 8th message. There was no mention in the Cincinnati office abstracts of the crash or recovery of an airborne object near Roswell.

Because the FBI message reported that debris from the Roswell crash was being transported to Wright Field for examination, we attempted to determine whether military regulations existed for handling such debris. We were unable to locate any applicable regulation. As a final step, we reviewed Air Materiel Command (Wright Field) records from 1947 to 1950 for evidence of command personnel involvement in this matter. We found no records mentioning the Roswell crash or the examination by Air Materiel Command personnel of any debris recovered from the crash.

Queries to Federal Agencies Regarding Records on the Crash

We sent letters to several federal agencies asking for any government records they might have concerning the Roswell crash. In this regard, we contacted DOD, the National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the CIA, the FBI, and the Department of Energy.

The National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the Department of Energy responded that they had no government records relating to the Roswell crash. (Copies of their responses appear in app. III, IV, and V.) The FBI, DOD, and the CIA provided the following information.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

The FBI informed us that all FBI data regarding the crash near Roswell had been processed under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests previously received by the Bureau. We reviewed the FBI's FOIA material and identified the July 8, 1947, FBI teletype message discussing the recovery near Roswell of a high-altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector. (A copy of the FBI's response appears in app. VI.)

Department of Defense

DOD informed us that the U.S. Air Force report of July 1994, entitled Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident, represents the extent of DOD records or information concerning the Roswell crash. The Air Force report concluded that there was no dispute that something

happened near Roswell in July 1947 and that all available official materials indicated the most likely source of the wreckage recovered was one of the project MOGUL balloon trains. At the time of the Roswell crash, project MOGUL was a highly classified U.S. effort to determine the state of Soviet nuclear weapons research using balloons that carried radar reflectors and acoustic sensors. (A copy of DOD's response appears in app. VII.)

Central Intelligence Agency

In March 1995, the CIA's Executive Director responded to our letter of inquiry by stating that earlier searches by the CIA for records on unidentified flying objects produced no information pertaining to the Roswell crash. The Executive Director added, however, that it was unclear whether the CIA had ever conducted a search for records specifically relating to Roswell. In the absence of such assurance, the Executive Director instructed CIA personnel to conduct a comprehensive records search for information relating to Roswell. On May 30, 1995, the CIA's Executive Director informed us that a search against the term "Roswell, New Mexico," in all CIA databases produced no CIA documents related to the crash. (A copy of CIA's response appears in app. VIII.)

Agency Comments

A draft of this report was provided to DOD for comment. DOD offered no comments or suggested changes to the report. The Chief Archivist, National Personnel Records Center offered several comments clarifying matters dealing with records management. These comments have been incorporated into the final report where appropriate.

The CIA, the Department of Energy, the FBI, the National Security Council, and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy also received excerpts from the report discussing the activities of their respective agencies. They had no substantive comments and made no suggested changes to the report.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the requirements for reporting air accidents in 1947, we interviewed military service records management officials, reviewed military record-keeping regulations in effect during this time period, and examined Army Air Forces and Navy air accident reports.

We also sought to identify any government records related to the Roswell crash. In this regard, we visited and reviewed records at the locations listed in table 1.

Table 1: Locations Visited and Records Reviewed

Locations visited	Records reviewed
National Archives, Washington, D.C.	Air Force papers on unidentified flying objects Army Counterintelligence Corps historical files, 1947-49
National Archives II, College Park, Md.	Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14 National Security Council meeting minutes, 1947-48
National Archives, National Record Center, Suitland, Md.	Army Inspector General reports, 1947-58 Army staff intelligence correspondence, 1947-56 Headquarters Army Air Force message traffic, 1947-54 Army Air Force and Air Materiel Command (Wright Field) research and development files, 1947-50
National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo.	Morning reports for RAAF units, July 1947 Eighth Air Force messages, 1947-50 Eighth Air Force correspondence, 1947-51 Eighth Air Force weekly activity summaries, July 1947 Service records of key personnel assigned to RAAF, 1947 Project Sign[a] investigative reports, 1948 Army Adjutant General correspondence, 1947-49 Missile test firing reports at White Sands, N. Mex., 1947-54
Department of the Air Force, Washington, D.C.	Current and past records management regulations Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident, July 1994
Department of the Army, Washington, D.C.	Current and past records management regulations
Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.	Air accident reports, July 1947
Air Force Safety Agency, Kirtland Air Force Base, N. Mex.	Air accident reports, July 1947
Air Force History Support Office, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C.	509th Bomb Group and RAAF monthly histories, July and August 1947
National Security Agency, Fort Meade, Md.	FOIA records, Citizens Against UFO Secrecy
Military History Institute, Army War College, Carlisle, Pa.	Army Counterintelligence Corps reports, 1947
Army Central Security Facility, Fort Meade, Md.	Army Counterintelligence Corps reports, 1947
Central Intelligence Agency, Langley, Va.	Scientific Advisory Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects (Robertson Panel) report FOIA records, Ground Saucer Watch, Inc.
Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.	FOIA records on unidentified flying objects
National Atomic Museum, Kirtland Air Force Base, N. Mex.	509th Bomb Group historical information, 1947 RAAF base newspaper Atomic Blast, July and August 1947

[a]Project Sign was the predecessor to Project Blue Book.

Our search of government records was complicated by the fact that some records we wanted to review were missing and there was not always an explanation. Further, the records management regulations for the retention and disposition of records were unclear or changing during the period we reviewed.

We also queried the National Security Council, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Department of Energy, the FBI, DOD, and the CIA to determine what government records they have on the Roswell crash. We did not independently verify the information provided to us in their written responses.

In addition to physically examining government records, we contacted the following federal activities to determine whether they had any information about the Roswell crash:

- Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama;
- Air Force Aeronautical Systems Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio;
- Army Center for Military History, Washington, D.C.; and
- 509th Bomb Wing, Office of the Historian, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri.

We conducted our review from March 1994 to June 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will make copies available to other interested parties upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please call me on (202) 512-3504. A major contributor to this report is Gary K. Weeter, Assistant Director.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Davis

Richard Davis
Director, National Security
Analysis

Contents

Letter	1
Appendix I Combined History for July 1947	12
Appendix II FBI Teletype Message Dated July 8, 1947	14
Appendix III Comments From the National Security Council	15
Appendix IV Comments From the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President	16
Appendix V Comments From the Department of Energy	17
Appendix VI Comments From the Federal Bureau of Investigation	18

Appendix VII Comments From the Department of Defense 19

Appendix VIII Comments From the Central Intelligence Agency 20

Table

Table 1: Locations Visited and Records Reviewed 7

Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
RAAF	Roswell Army Air Field

Combined History for July 1947

COMBINED HISTORY

509TH BOMB GROUP

AND

ROSWELL ARMY AIR FIELD

1 JULY 1947 THROUGH 31 JULY 1947

DECLASSIFIED
APR

RESTRICTED

The other three briefings were those which were given to the VIP and a simulated briefing to a large group of Air Scouts representing all of the troops in New Mexico which was given on 15 July 1947.

Several small projects were completed during the month including signs on all the office doors, a building directory, and a world situation map which is maintained on a day-to-day basis.

The Historical Section of S-2 has been seriously handicapped by the removal of the regular stenographer with the reduction in force.

Due to the fact that the quality of the department reports has in general been so inadequate, lectures are being prepared to be given early in August to properly train the liaison representatives of each department.

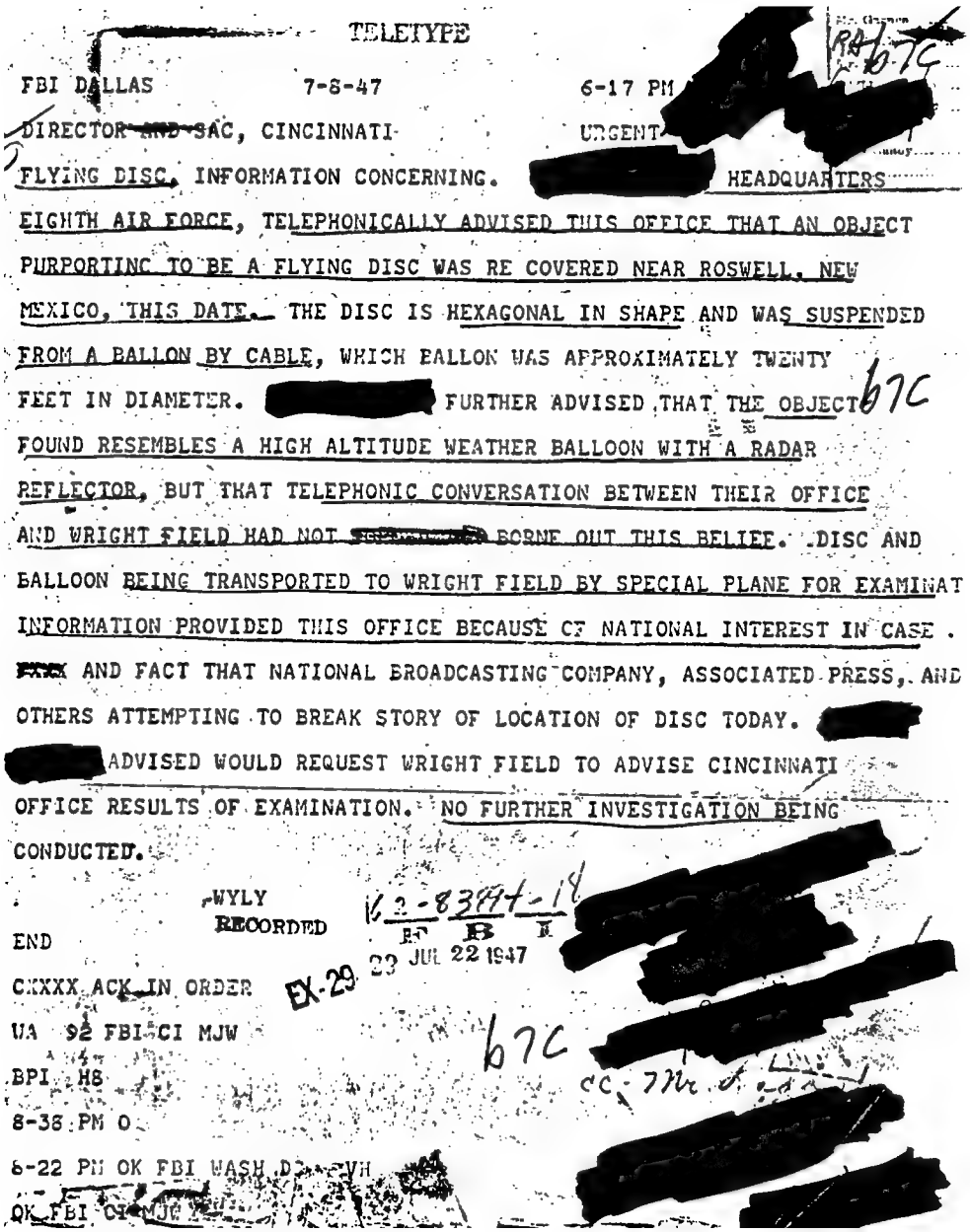
The Office of Public Information was kept quite busy during the month answering inquiries on the "flying disc", which was reported to be in possession of the 509th Bomb Group. The object turned out to be a radar tracking balloon.

The main project of the month was making all arrangements for a successful Air Force Day. Lt. Colonel Oliver LaFarge, Air Reserve Corps, at Santa Fe, made arrangements for Colonel Blanchard to visit the Governor of New Mexico and ask him to declare Air Force Day in New Mexico on 1 August.

RESTRICTED

39

FBI Teletype Message Dated July 8, 1947



TELETYPE

FBI DALLAS 7-8-47 6-17 PM

DIRECTOR AND SAC, CINCINNATI URGENT

FLYING DISC. INFORMATION CONCERNING. [redacted] HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH AIR FORCE, TELEPHONICALLY ADVISED THIS OFFICE THAT AN OBJECT PURPORTING TO BE A FLYING DISC WAS RE COVERED NEAR ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO, THIS DATE. THE DISC IS HEXAGONAL IN SHAPE AND WAS SUSPENDED FROM A BALLON BY CABLE, WHICH BALLON WAS APPROXIMATELY TWENTY FEET IN DIAMETER. [redacted] FURTHER ADVISED THAT THE OBJECT FOUND RESEMBLES A HIGH ALTITUDE WEATHER BALLOON WITH A RADAR REFLECTOR, BUT THAT TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION BETWEEN THEIR OFFICE AND WRIGHT FIELD HAD NOT [redacted] BORNE OUT THIS BELIEF. DISC AND BALLOON BEING TRANSPORTED TO WRIGHT FIELD BY SPECIAL PLANE FOR EXAMINAT INFORMATION PROVIDED THIS OFFICE BECAUSE OF NATIONAL INTEREST IN CASE . [redacted] AND FACT THAT NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY, ASSOCIATED PRESS, AND OTHERS ATTEMPTING TO BREAK STORY OF LOCATION OF DISC TODAY. [redacted] ADVISED WOULD REQUEST WRIGHT FIELD TO ADVISE CINCINNATI OFFICE RESULTS OF EXAMINATION. NO FURTHER INVESTIGATION BEING CONDUCTED.

WYLY

RECORDED 62-8344-18

END EX-29 23 JUL 22 1947

CXXXX ACK IN ORDER

UA 92 FBI CI MJW

BPI H8

8-38 PM O

6-22 PM OK FBI WASH DC VH

OK FBI CI MJW

Comments From the National Security Council

9K 2948

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

April 28, 1995

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. JOSEPH E. KELLEY
Director-in-Charge, International
Affairs Issues
General Accounting Office

SUBJECT: Request for NSC Records

I am responding to your April 12, 1995, request for information or NSC records related to the crash of an airborne object near Roswell, New Mexico in July 1947. The NSC has no records or information related to the incident at Roswell.

For information about any government records that may document the crash at Roswell, we suggest you contact the National Archives, Textual Reference Division, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland 20740. Their telephone number is (301) 713-7230.

Andrew D. Sens
Executive Secretary

Comments From the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20500

April 26, 1995

Dear Mr. Hunt:

In response to your recent inquiry of April 12, 1995. The Office of Science and Technology Policy reviewed its records regarding the Roswell Incident. OSTP has no direct knowledge of what occurred at Roswell and no records, except for the information I received from the Air Force.

I look forward to receiving the GAO report.

Sincerely,

John H. Gibbons
Director

Enclosures
As stated

Mr. William Hunt
Director, Federal Management Issues
United States Government Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Comments From the Department of Energy

Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

June 8, 1995

Richard Davis
Director, National Security
Analysis
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20538

Dear Mr. Davis:

This is in response to your request for records related to the crash of an airborne object near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947. We conducted an in-depth search for documents related to the crash and have found no such documents.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Barry Uhlig of my staff on 202-586-1910.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Vivona
Chief Financial Officer

Printed with soy ink on recycled paper

Comments From the Federal Bureau of Investigation

U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Washington, D. C. 20535

April 24, 1995

Mr. Richard Davis
Director
Attn: Gary K. Weeter
National Security Analysis
General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Davis:

This is in response to a letter dated April 7, 1995, from Norman J. Rabkin, Director, Administration of Justice Issues, General Accounting Office, to John E. Collingwood, Inspector in Charge, Office of Public and Congressional Affairs, FBI, regarding government records concerning the crash of an airborne object near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947 (Code 701034).

A search of FBI indices for information relating to the crash of an airborne object near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947, determined that all FBI data concerning the incident has been processed under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and is available for review in our FOIA Reading Room. A copy of the document forwarded to me by Gary Weeter is among the documents in the Reading Room. If your staff wishes to review the material, please call Margaret Tremblay, a member of my staff, at least 48 hours in advance of the desired appointment. She can be reached on 324-5292.

Sincerely yours,

Swanson D. Carter
Supervisory Special Agent
Office of Public and
Congressional Affairs

Comments From the Department of Defense

INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
400 ARMY NAVY DRIVE
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22202-2884

MAY - 4 1995

Analysis
and Followup

Mr. Richard Davis
Director, National Security Analysis
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street N.W.
Room 5025
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Davis:

The Department of the Air Force July 1994 report is the DoD response to questions posed in your April 12 letter related to GAO Code 701034.

If you have any questions, please contact my action officer, Pattie Cirino, at 703-604-9631. If she is not available, please contact Ms. Merlene L. Scales at 703-604-9626.

Kathryn M. Truex
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for GAO Report Analysis

Enclosure

Comments From the Central Intelligence Agency

Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

30 May 1995

Mr. Richard Davis
Director, National Security Analysis
US General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Davis,

In a letter dated 30 March 1995, this Agency advised you that it would conduct a comprehensive record search to aid in the completion of your investigation of the crash of an airborne object near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947. In accordance with your request, we have searched all of our data bases against the terms "Project Mogul" and "Roswell, New Mexico."

The search did not yield any documents related to either of these terms. Therefore, this Agency has no information, beyond those records already reviewed by Mr. Gary Weeter of your staff, relevant to your investigation.

Sincerely,

Nora Slatkin
Executive Director

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